



**The Watchtower at the East Entrance to the Grand Canyon**

## Grand Canyon National Park

The Grand Canyon is in northern Arizona, an hour and a half drive north of Flagstaff, or a half day drive east of Las Vegas. It was established originally as a national monument in 1908 and became a national park in 1919. The Grand Canyon was created in six million years by the Colorado River.

### **Best Feature: America's Largest Canyon**

The Grand Canyon is 277 miles (445 km) long and up to 18 miles (29 km) across. At the paved overlooks, it averages one mile deep and 10 miles (16 km) across, as the crow flies. As such, it is overwhelming in its immensity – its size can only be appreciated from the air. Overlooks near the south entrance are great for first impressions and gaping expressions.

### **Best Months: Mid-April through October**

The best times to view the park are actually in spring and fall, when it is less crowded and much cooler. However, summer is the most popular time to visit the park and advance reservations are essential. Summer is also the time of "monsoonal" moisture from Mexico, so skies are frequently cloudy in July and August. Nonetheless, summer temperatures reach into the 80s on the South Rim and 100s on the canyon floor.

The North Rim is approximately 8000 ft (~2400 m) elevation and is closed in winter, usually from November until mid-May. There is a greater variety of trees on the North Rim.

The South Rim is open all year, being 1000 ft lower at 7000 ft (~2100 m), and is frequently cold and snow-covered in winter.



**Mohave Point View on the West Rim of the Grand Canyon**

## Best Tours

The South Rim is where you should go for your first visit to the Grand Canyon. The Visitor Center, Museum, restaurants, lodging, gas, and numerous overlooks are along the South Rim. Be sure to pick up a park map and *The Guide*, the park's official newspaper, at the entrance. Even though the South Rim will be crowded in summer, it is easily accessible from Flagstaff, Arizona. The sun will be at your back for most of the overlooks, except possibly at sunrise and sunset.

The North Rim is closed in winter and is not readily accessible, requiring a six hour drive of 215 miles (346 km) from the South Rim to the North Rim, even though it is only 10 miles as the crow flies. The North Rim is also a six hour drive from Las Vegas, the closest large city. The North Rim is over a thousand feet higher than the South Rim, is cooler, and heavily forested.

The Grand Canyon is viewed well at any time of the day, although many prefer the colors and shadows at sunrise and sunset. Morning is likely to be less hazy than afternoon, and there will also be fewer jet trails above the horizon. Smog is dependent on the winds from California, as well as the power plants upstream on the Colorado River. Overlooks along the South Rim view west, north, or east, depending on the overlook, so it is not difficult to find a proper sun angle.

If you are entering the park from the south, toward Grand Canyon Village, stop at the two outstanding overlooks, **Mather Point** and **Yavapai Point**. Yavapai Point is likely to be very busy as it also has the Yavapai Museum, with many interesting facts and maps; parking is limited. The new Visitor Center is across the road from Mather Point, and is a short level

hike. The new emphasis is to use free shuttle buses to cut down traffic, and shuttle service is available to the Visitor Center, Yaki Point, the West Rim, and other locations within the park.

After visiting the village and the West Rim, head east along the South Rim toward the Watchtower and Desert View overlooks. If you are staying at the Grand Canyon Village or within the park, you can return along the same route. Otherwise, you can exit the park at the east entrance station, and return to Flagstaff or head elsewhere.

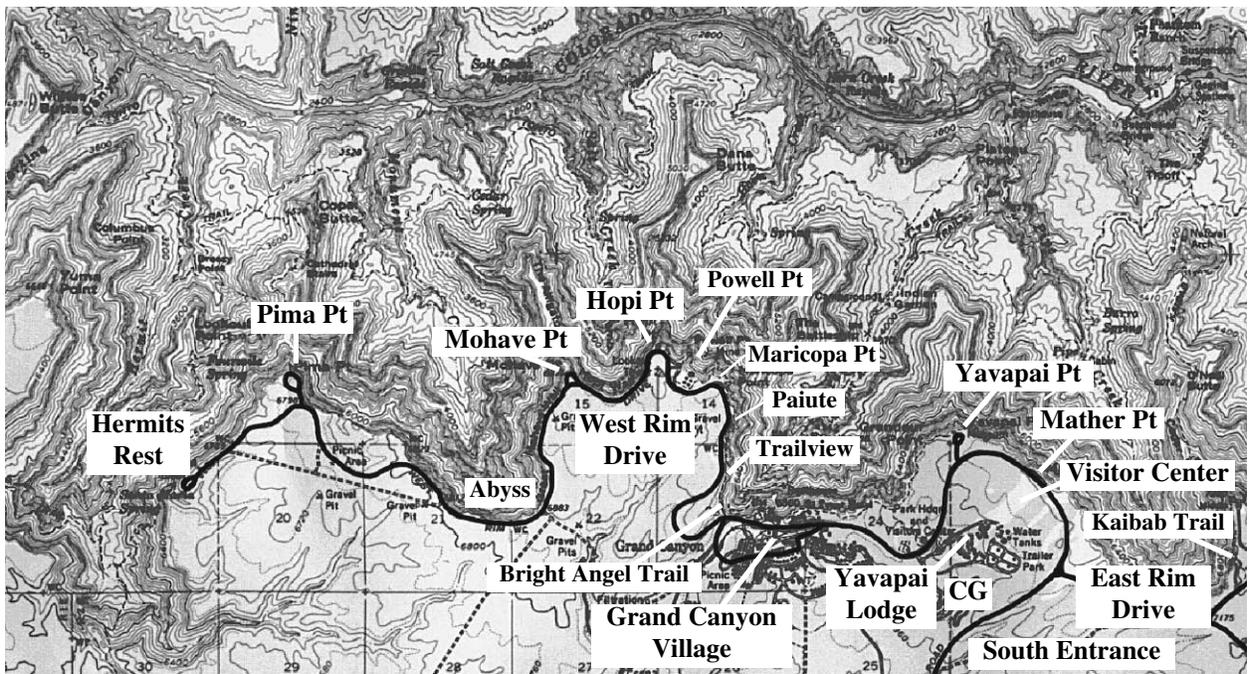
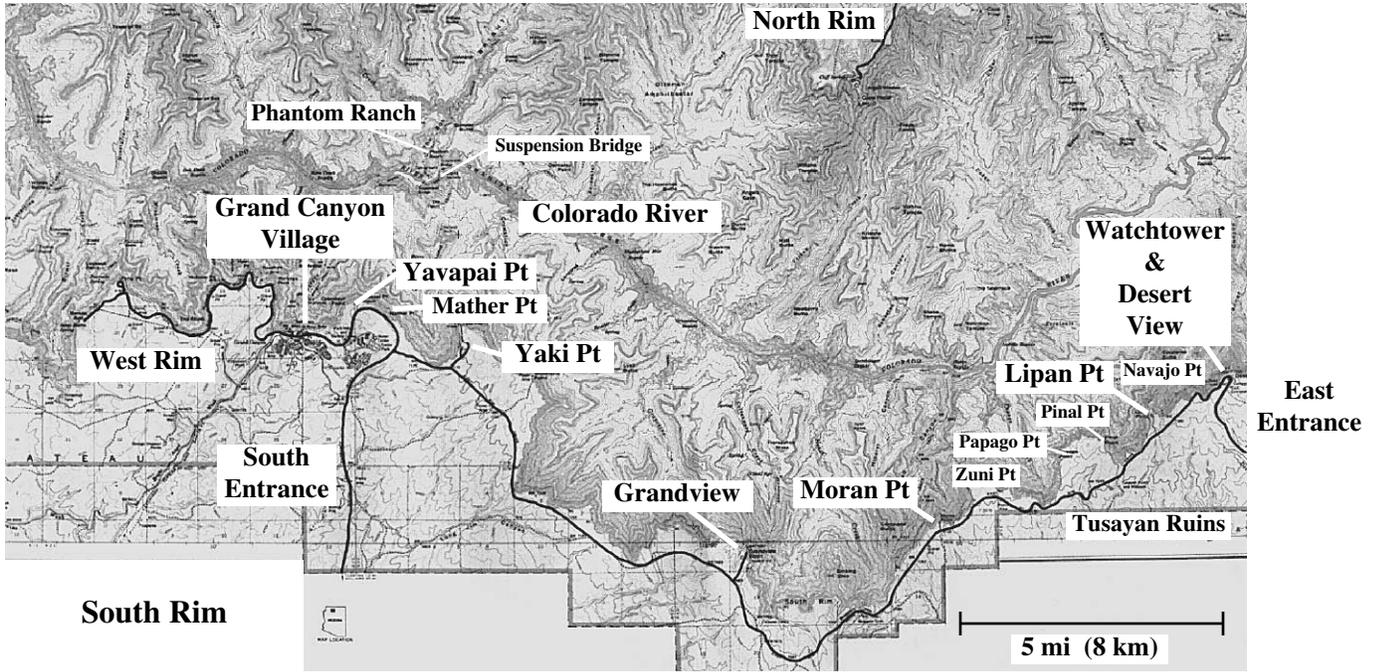
If you are entering the South Rim from the east, known as East Rim Drive, be sure to stop at Desert View, Lipan Point, and then stop by Yavapai Point and Yavapai Museum before exploring the Visitor Center and the West Rim Drive. Chances are you will be staying at Grand Canyon Village or nearby to the south, so be sure to catch sunset from one of the overlooks on either side of Grand Canyon Village.

The West Rim Drive along the South Rim is accessible only by foot or shuttle during the peak tourist season (Memorial Day weekend through October). Along this road are many overlooks which are discussed later.

There are many trailheads that lead down into the canyon. From the South Rim, the park's newspaper recommends taking the Bright Angel Trail, just to the west of Grand Canyon Village, or the more scenic South Kaibab Trail, which starts at Yaki Point. Because of the 7000 ft elevation, hike safe distances allowing twice as long for the return trip. You may prefer to ride by mule, but you will have better luck getting a mule ride from the North Rim rather than the South Rim, as the South Rim rides may fill a year in advance.

Note: The park's newspaper, *The Guide*, has been discontinued since this book's publication, and the West Rim Drive is now only open to traffic for a couple months in winter. See [www.nps.gov/grca](http://www.nps.gov/grca)

# Map of Grand Canyon National Park



West Rim Drive and Grand Canyon Village

## Sightseeing Highlights

### South Entrance and Grand Canyon Village

Be sure to stop at Mather Point and Yavapai Point, two of the best overlooks near the south entrance. If these points are too crowded, try coming back in the morning or evening, as the overlooks are always open. However, Yavapai Museum, which is at Yavapai Point, is open during daylight hours, and there are excellent maps inside the museum that identify Phantom Ranch (the small green spot) and the bridge to cross the river below. You will probably change your mind about hiking to the bottom of the canyon from this viewpoint. The new visitor center is across the road from Mather Point. Grand Canyon Village shares a campground, several motels, shops, restaurants, and train and bus depots, so it is always crowded. Crowds diminish east or west away from Grand Canyon Village.

### West Rim Drive

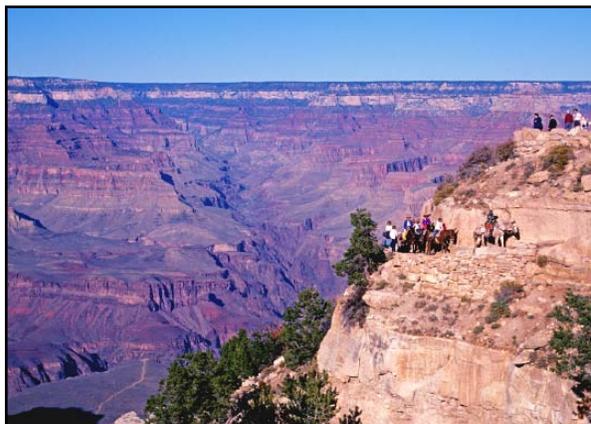
The west rim is accessible via a shuttle bus or you may walk this 8 mile (13 km) rim road and trail. Most of the overlooks are spectacular, and the best ones are identified with an exclamation point (!):

- Bright Angel Trailhead
- Trailview ! – views trail & village
- Paiute – also views trail & village
- Maricopa Pt.
- Powell Memorial !
- Hopi Pt. !
- Mohave Pt. ! – views Hermit Rapids
- The Abyss
- Pima Pt. !
- Hermits Rest

There are many more turnouts on this drive, so stop as you wish. Bright Angel Trail starts just west of the village, and it is a day's round trip just to get down to Plateau Point and a view of



**Yavapai Point View of Phantom Ranch**



**Bright Angel Mule Trip**



**Hermits Rapids from Mohave Point**

the Colorado River in the inner canyon. It is a day's journey to hike one way to the river, and you must have permits and plenty of water to

stay overnight. At Mohave Point, only three miles west of the Grand Canyon Village, you can see the Colorado River and may hear the rapids a mile below. Hermits Rest has restrooms, refreshments, and some souvenirs.

### **East Rim Drive**

There are many overlooks on the East Rim Drive along the South Rim, and the best ones are identified by an exclamation point (!) below:

- Yaki Pt. ! – accessible via shuttle or foot
- Grandview – in a ponderosa pine forest
- Moran Pt.
- Tusayan Ruins
- Lipan Pt. !
- Navajo Pt – view of Watchtower at sunset
- Desert View and Watchtower !

The scenic South Kaibab foot trail starts at Yaki Point, but the round trip down to Cedar Ridge can take up to half a day. You may prefer to hike a short distance instead. Between Grandview overlook and Grand Canyon Village, the rim is high enough to support the ponderosa pine tree, home to Abert's squirrel. The canyon is not as deep from the east entrance, but sunrise and sunset can be spectacular from Lipan Point. At Desert View, there is a small visitor center and campground. Beyond the east entrance is the Navajo Indian Reservation and Indian goods are sold along the roadside.

### **Wildlife**

Although wild animals are present, you will not likely see many large animals except possibly deer. Smaller animals and birds are probably all that you will see. Abert's squirrel is common in Ponderosa pine forests.



**View from Yaki Point at Sunrise**



**The Watchtower at the East Entrance**



**Welcome to the Grand Canyon!**

### **North Rim Drive**

The North Rim is open from mid-May until late-October or the first heavy snowfall. It may open in early May if winter snows were light, and close as late as early December if major snowstorms hold off until December. However, lodging, campgrounds, and facilities are usually open from mid-May to the latter part of October. North Rim lodging is handled by Forever Resorts, (877) 386-4383.

Grasses and aspen trees should have their summer foliage near or slightly after Memorial Day. However, the canyon haze is worst in summer, and fall is a better time to visit the North Rim as well as for viewing fall colors. Early October is an excellent time.

Since the developed areas of the North Rim encompass a relatively small area, by comparison to the South Rim, there is only one lodge, a few nice cabins, and only one campground. Although the North Rim only receives about ten percent of the total number of Grand Canyon visitors, reservations are essential. Without reservations, you may have to stay an hour's drive away at Jacob Lake or further north, and there are signs at Jacob Lake usually telling you that the North Rim campground is full. However, you may be able to obtain mule rides the next day in the off-season.

There are a limited number of overlooks along the North Rim Drive, and as long as you've driven so far to get here, you might as well stop at all of them. However, the best ones are identified with an exclamation point:

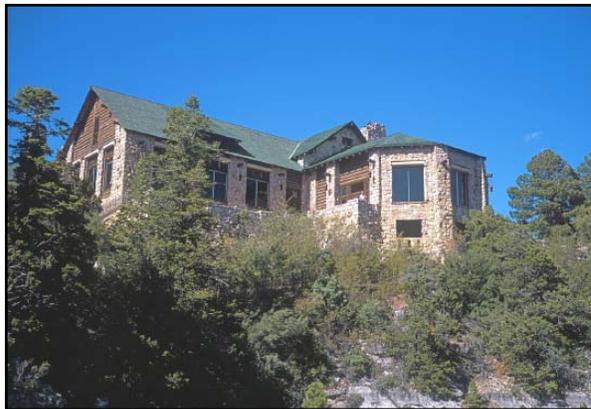
Bright Angel Point! – near North Rim Lodge  
Point Imperial ! – at 8803 ft elevation

Vista Encantadora

Painted Desert Overlook

Walhalla Overlook ! – at 7993 ft elevation

Cape Royal – lowest point.



**North Rim Lodge**



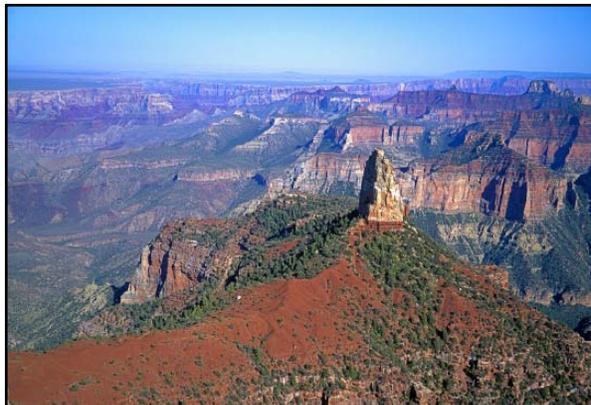
**Bright Angel Point**



**Walhalla Overlook**

The north entrance passes many meadows, pine trees, and aspen trees, and the main road ends at the Lodge, which has a wonderful dining room overlooking the canyon. A short walk takes you to an elevation of 8148 ft at Bright Angel Point, with magnificent views in the morning or evening. Above the canyon rim off in the distance is Humphrey's Peak, the tallest in the state of Arizona at 12,643 ft. To the right of Humphrey's Peak on the South Rim, with the aid of binoculars, a telescope, or a telephoto lens, you can see Grand Canyon Village far across the canyon, and the Bright Angel Trail descending into the canyon from the other side.

A turnoff from the main road, a couple miles north of the lodge, takes you to Point Imperial and the Walhalla Plateau. Overlooks from this road are a good place to watch sunrise, but then the sun is in your face until afternoon – so overall this drive is best in evening a few hours before sunset. Point Imperial is the highest point on the North Rim, and despite being assured there are no rattlesnakes on the North Rim, lizards can be seen at Point Imperial. The Walhalla Overlook near Cape Royal is outstanding because of the photogenic curves in the Colorado River below. As you descend to Cape Royal, the ground cover changes from a ponderosa pine forest with aspen trees to a scrub forest with pinyon pine and juniper trees. The Cape Royal overlook is good in morning or afternoon, and although not as scenic as other overlooks, does have outstanding tutorial signs on native vegetation. Be sure to walk as far as Angels Window, where you can see the Colorado River through a natural arch window, the Cape Royal walkway above, and the Watchtower far off on the South Rim of the canyon.



**Point Imperial**

There are a number of trails along the rim and leading down into the canyon. However, the distance to the Colorado River from the North Rim is 14 miles (22 km) by foot, much further than from the South Rim, and drops an additional 1000 ft, so is more strenuous. Round trips are not possible in one day, so overnight permits must be obtained well in advance of your visit. See *The Guide* for the North Rim.

The North Rim has a large number of deer, so be careful driving at twilight or night. It is also the only home to the Kaibab squirrel, which looks like other tufted ear squirrels found in ponderosa pine forests except for the dark red stripe on its back.



**Cape Royal**

## Accommodations, Fun, and Climate

### Lodging and Campgrounds

There is lodging in Grand Canyon Village, but you must have advance reservations as you will be very lucky to find a vacancy the same day. See [www.grandcanyonlodges.com](http://www.grandcanyonlodges.com) or call (888) 297-2757 for reservations for Bright Angel Lodge, Thunderbird Lodge, Kashina Lodge, or El Tovar Hotel, all located on the South Rim. Modern lodges are near the visitor center but not on the rim. There are also motels just south of the park entrance in Tusayan, but these too tend to fill early. Check in the AAA Tour Books for phone numbers and prices. If you do not have advance reservations, you will probably have to stay in Flagstaff, a 1½ hour drive to the south.

There are two campgrounds along the South Rim, one at Canyon Village and one at the Watchtower near the east entrance. Trailer Village at Canyon Village supports RVs. Campsites will fill early, and you may have to camp south of the main entrance.

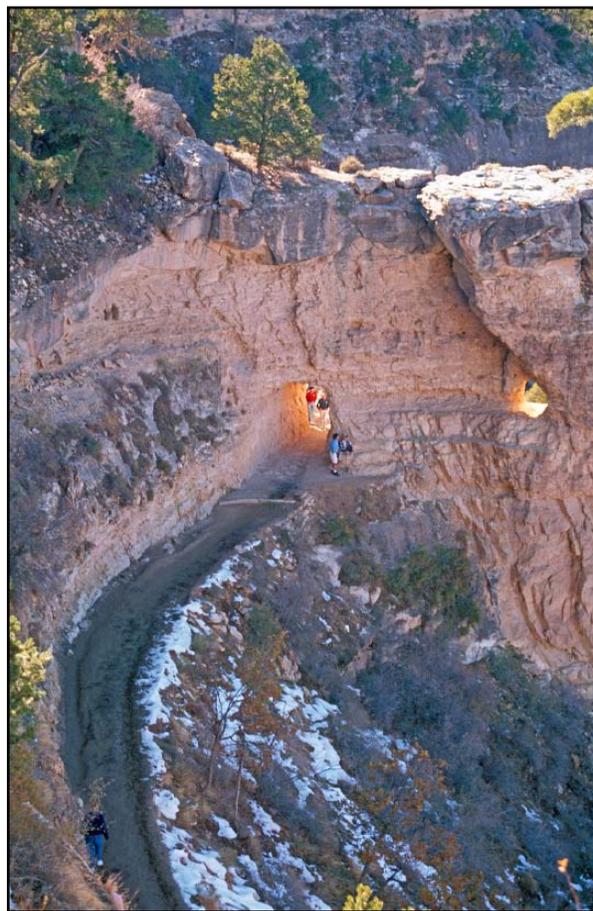
### Activities

Hiking trails start from many overlooks. Hike within your limits, and allow twice as long for the return trip up the canyon. Several hundred people overestimate their abilities every year and need park assistance to get back to the rim. Although you may be out of shape, one can blame it on the elevation.

Mule rides are also available, but may be booked a year in advance on the South Rim. You may also desire to take a raft trip through the Grand Canyon, but these too fill quickly. There is an old fashioned steam locomotive ride between Williams, Arizona and the center of Grand Canyon Village. Call (928) 638-2631 for information on mule trips, raft rides, and (800) THE-TRAIN for old fashioned train rides.

### Additional Information

Check with your travel agent and the park's Superintendent, Grand Canyon National Park, P.O. Box 129, Grand Canyon, Arizona, 86023, for more information. Free literature from the park will give you the latest phone numbers and addresses for lodging, camping, mule and raft rides, and bus and air tours. Additional phone numbers are listed in this free literature in case you have difficulty getting through on the main phone line.



**Bright Angel Trail**

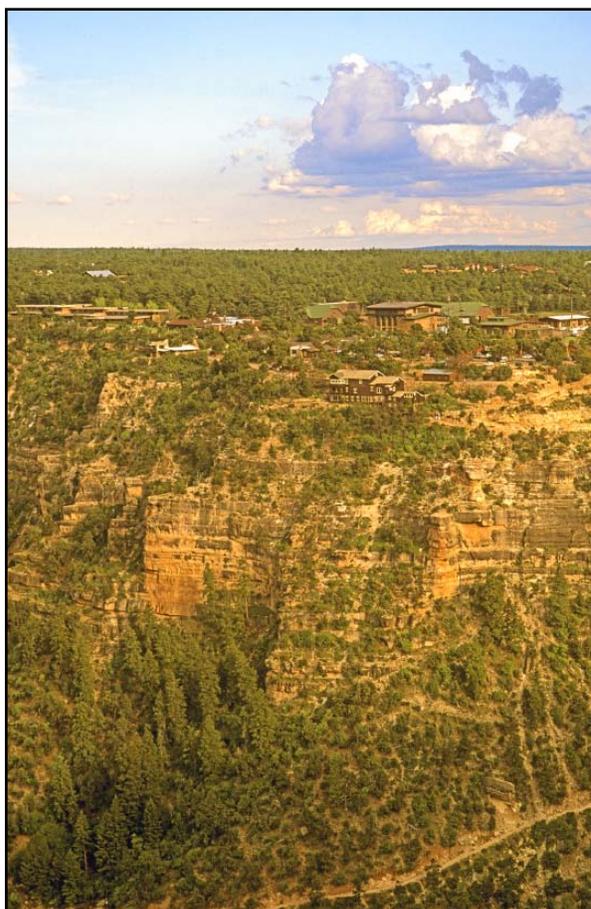
### Time Zone and Weather

The Grand Canyon is far west in the Mountain Time Zone, but because most of Arizona does not observe Daylight Savings Time, the sun sets a little earlier than expected in late spring, summer, and early fall. The local time is the same as in California when Daylight Savings Time is in effect for the rest of the country, but one hour ahead of California in winter. It is cold and snowy in winter, and hot in summer, especially at the river on the canyon floor. July and August have the least number of clear days, with frequent "monsoonal" moisture, yet June, July, and August are still the hottest months of the year. Temperatures in the table below are typical of South Rim temperatures; the canyon floor may be 20 degrees hotter. Sunrise and sunset times are for the middle of the month at the Grand Canyon and rounded to the nearest 15 minutes. Actual sunrise and sunset times may be up to a half hour different at the beginning or end of the month.

Month	Temperatures (°F)			
	Highs	Lows	Sunrise	Sunset
January	40s	10s	7:45 am	5:30 pm
February	40s	20s	7:15 am	6 pm
March	50s	20s	6:45 am	6:30 pm
April	60s	30s	6 am	7 pm
May	70s	40	5:30 am	7:30 pm
June	80s	40s	5:15 am	7:45 pm
July	80s	50s	5:30 am	7:45 pm
August	80s	50s	5:45 am	7:15 pm
September	70s	40s	6:00 am	6:45 pm
October	60s	30s	6:30 am	6 pm
November	50s	20s	7 am	5:30 pm
December	40s	20s	7:45 am	5:15 pm



**The Grand Canyon Train**



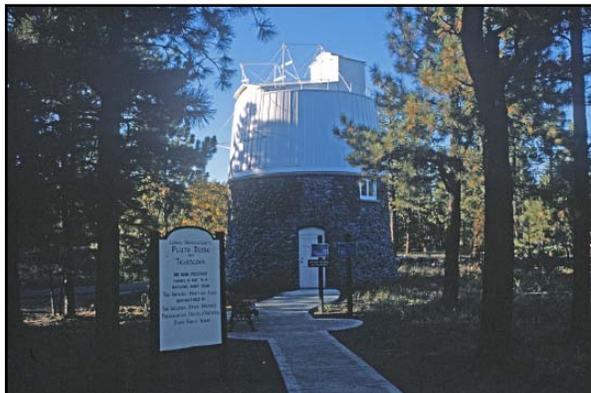
**Grand Canyon Village**

## Nearby Wonders

### Flagstaff

It is amazing to see Humphreys Peak and a pine forest surrounded by desert on all sides as you approach Flagstaff. It is a great place to stay for at least a night and is within a two hour drive from the Grand Canyon. You can visit Walnut Canyon just to the east of town and see cliff dwellings during the day. A little further east is Meteor Crater, and within two hours is the Petrified Forest National Park. Just to the south is Oak Creek Canyon; it will take about an hour to get to the beautiful red towers near Sedonia if you take the I-17 faster route toward Phoenix.

Within Flagstaff are Northern Arizona University and Lowell Observatory, where the “planet” Pluto was discovered. The United States Naval Observatory, which houses a much larger telescope, is also nearby.



**The Pluto Dome at Lowell Observatory**

### Meteor Crater

This well preserved crater is about a mile wide, created only 50,000 years ago when a meteor of about 50 meters (160 feet) diameter impacted the Earth. The kinetic energy was equivalent to a 10 megaton class nuclear bomb, but without the dangerous radioactivity. If ground zero was a city, the blast waves could level a city. However, today we could destroy such a meteor in space, before it enters the Earth’s atmosphere yet preferably beyond lunar orbit, using nuclear bombs with yields under a megaton. Meteor Crater is about a half hour drive east of Flagstaff, at Exit 233. The visitor center is on the northern rim of the



**Meteor Crater on the Horizon**



**Inside Meteor Crater**

crater, and its hours are posted at the exit ramp or online at [www.MeteorCrater.com](http://www.MeteorCrater.com). You can see the crater from I-40, and it is only a six mile drive south to reach the visitor center and view inside the crater.

The massive meteor that hit Chicxulub, Mexico, about 65 million years ago at the time of the KT boundary, and may have annihilated the dinosaurs, was probably 10 km (over 6 miles) in diameter with about 10 million times more energy than Meteor Crater, and resulted in a crater diameter of about 170 km. It is likely that such a monster meteor's orbit could be changed to miss Earth, using nuclear bombs in the 25 to 50 megaton class, ironically saving mankind from mass annihilation.

### **Petrified Forest National Park**

Petrified logs dot the desert floor in this park, within a two hour drive east of Flagstaff on I-40. You can buy samples outside of the park, so please don't pick up rocks in the park. Excellent turnouts to view these logs are at Crystal Forest, Long Logs, and Giant Logs near the museum. The trees are estimated to have been petrified about 225 million years ago during the late Triassic era.



**Petrified Log**

### **Grand Canyon Skywalk**

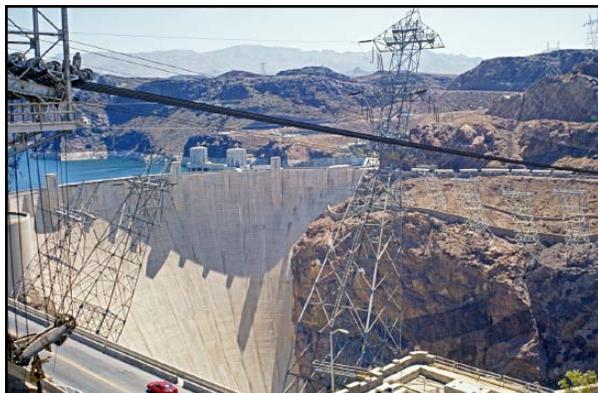
In 2007, the Grand Canyon Skywalk opened on the Hualapai Indian Reservation, about halfway between Flagstaff and Las Vegas, quite a ways off of old Route 66. Expect to pay extra for photos. The glass walkway is 4000 feet above the canyon floor.

### **Las Vegas**

Las Vegas is the gambling capital of the world. Today the famous Strip is better walked than driven due to traffic. Vegas is also the best major city to fly into to see the Grand Canyon, and the fares are also usually much cheaper. You can drive over Hoover Dam and visit the Grand Canyon Skywalk en route to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. On the return loop, you can drive over Glen Canyon Dam at Lake Powell, go to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, and even pass through Zion or Bryce National Parks if you wish. It is about the same distance to either the North or South Rims from Las Vegas, a good six hours by road. Allow a full day including stops to reach the Grand Canyon from Las Vegas, especially if you stop at Hoover Dam on the way to the South Rim. As a precaution, you may wish to avoid summer as the lower Nevada desert becomes very hot in summer.



**The Mirage Hotel, Las Vegas**



**Hoover Dam**

### **Hoover Dam**

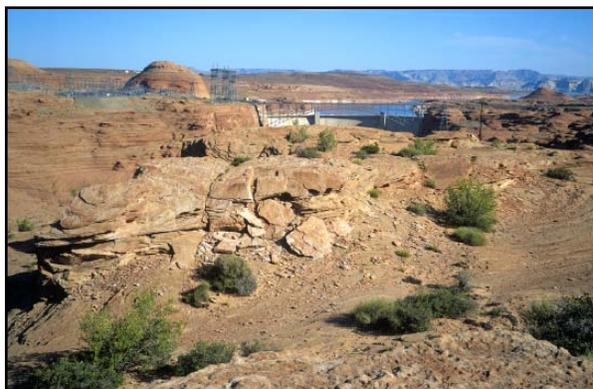
Hoover Dam was completed in 1936, standing 726 ft (221 m) high in the Black Canyon. The dam created Lake Mead National Recreation Area. Transformers buzz with electricity to power the neon lights of Las Vegas. It is just south of Las Vegas, on your way to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. There is a visitor center and tours are given daily to the hydroelectric turbines below. The turbines can generate about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  gigawatts of electricity.

### **Lake Powell**

Lake Powell, created by the Glen Canyon Dam, is a couple hours' drive north of the Grand Canyon. It has over 1800 miles of shoreline, the largest of any lake in the west, and is about 190 miles long. It is a favorite

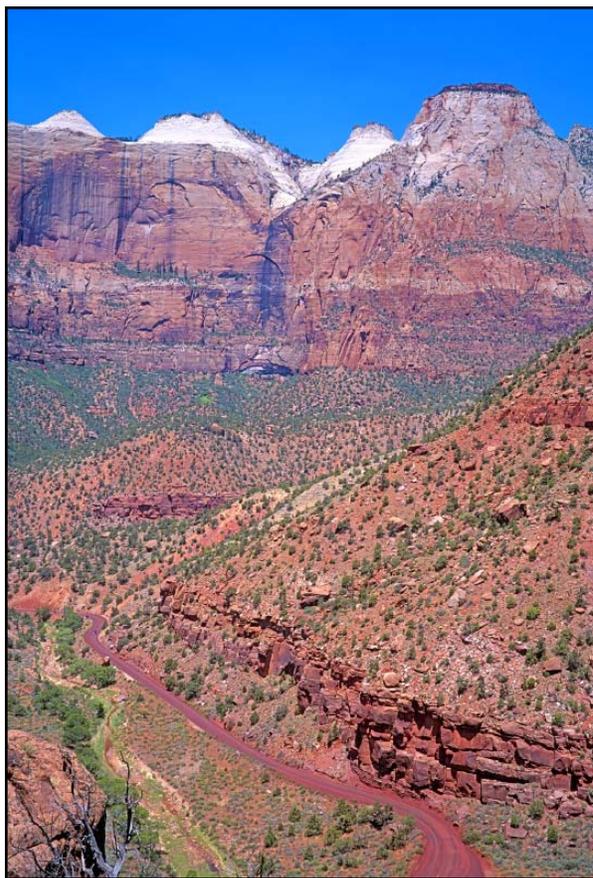


**Lake Powell**



**Glen Canyon Dam at Lake Powell**

spot for fishing and recreational boating, including motorboats and houseboats which can be rented. The waters are cold in spring and do not warm until later in the summer.



**Towers in Zion National Park**



**Sunset Point in Bryce National Park**

Lake Powell is best seen by boat and is noted for its spectacular canyon walls and nearby natural arches. A very long boat ride can take you to Rainbow Bridge, the tallest natural bridge in the world within Rainbow Bridge National Monument.

### **Zion and Bryce National Parks**

These parks are in southwestern Utah closer to the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Zion National Park can be traversed relatively quickly. Bryce Canyon National Park has spectacular hoodoos that reach for the skies. These hoodoos are better than any other in North America and colors are especially beautiful at sunrise and sunset.



**Hoodoos in Bryce National Park**